821
EB.D./Ero
46825

00046825

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
TOWN HALL, BOMBAY-400 023.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

EROS AGONISTES.

By E. B. D.

46825

"For Love is strong as Death."

LONDON:
HENRY S. KING & Co., 65, CORNHILL.
1872.

00046825

HEREWITH, my dearest nephew, have I sent
The manuscript you saw the other day,
And begged to read it. When that ink was wet,
You were a baby in the nurse's arms.
'Twas some few years after I had begun
The uphill struggle of an author's life
In this great capital. My college friend,
Young Walter Brand, had sometimes asked me down
To spend a week or so of holiday
At his home in the country. 'Tis long since;
And some among the many friends who formed
Our happy parties then are in their graves,
And all the family is broken up,
And gone I know not whither. The old hall
Is let to strangers. 'Twas a pleasant place,
With its trim lawns and prim parterres and walks,
Its stately cedars and unbounded wealth

Of fruit-trees trained against the sunny walls.
He had one sister: when I saw her first,
A sharp clutch at my heart-strings told my heart
That I had seen my fate; and afterwards
Each moment passed within the paradise
Of that sweet presence told me still the same.
But I was poor and proud, and they were rich;
And something whispered that it suited not
With nicest honour, being freely asked
And royally entertained, to set my snares
To win the pride and darling of the house
To share my struggling fortunes in the world.
Besides, you know, then I had other ties
And duties, which my slender earnings scarce
Sufficed to meet. The time too was but short
To entertain an issue which involved
The after-happiness of one for whom
I would have gladly died. Had more been given,
I might perhaps have drifted to a point
Where I had told her all. It might have been
In some events my duty: I half thought—

No matter what I thought. It was, no doubt,
My foolish vanity.. And so each time
I saw her face, I deemed it was my part
To long in silence; and each visit o'er,
Trembled to think that it might be the last.
Yet still I cherished fond hopes that some day
We two might meet again in such a state
Of altered circumstance that, with fair hope
And with no sense of shame, I might essay
To win her love. But it was not to be.
One autumn, when I counted up the hours
To an approaching visit at the hall,
With longing expectation not unmixed
With sense of pain, for pent-up feeling made
Her presence not pure joy, a message came
That she was ill: a fever caught, it said,
From some poor children at the village school.
And I, who worshipped e'en the very ground
On which she trod, dared only answer back
In words of ordinary condolence.
She got quite well again; and afterwards

I met my friend in town, and whether 'twas
A something in my manner when I asked
After her health betrayed an interest
Deeper than he approved, or from what cause
I know not,—deaths of relatives, fresh ties
Up-springing,—somehow I was never asked
After that time again, and have not seen
Her face these many years. They left the house
Some two years later. He became in time
The portly rector of a distant cure,
And I lost sight of him; and so the tie
That bound my hopes to me, being unloosed,
They flew away, and left me all alone.
And what became of her I do not know.
There is one column of the newspaper
I have not dared to look at many years.
Then I fell ill, o'erwrought with mental pain
And ceaseless toil pursued as anodyne
To lull my pain: and being forbid to work,
I fell to jotting down the thoughts that thronged
My weary brain in those sad nights and days.

Sometimes I thought that I was going mad,
The recollections of the past appeared
So much more clear to me than things around.
And then again I scarce could realize
That such things in my life had ever been.
"Poor lines," you'll say, perhaps; but some relief
Their fabrication yielded to my soul.
The two first stanzas, you will understand,
Were written some time after all the rest,
By way of introduction; and the rest,
From time to time, as the mind seized the thread
Of interrupted thought from time to time.
They cannot mean to you, I know full well,
All that they mean to me; but do not laugh
At your poor uncle's foolish rhapsodies.
I would that such a love might cross your path,
To shield you from the evil of the world,
Though not as mine was fruitless. So, farewell.

EROS AGONISTES.

I.

How Love, forlorn of hope, enduring long,
May rise triumphant over Doubt and Death,
In these few mournful strains of broken song
I fain would tell. O song that asks for breath
Such as inspires the wild swan's dying voice,
When down the desolate spaces of the mere
He drifts with failing might, but doth rejoice
In his last agony—I greatly fear
Lest that deep Love the least dishonour take
From this poor song of mine, who greatly long
To utter it in words. For Love's sweet sake
Let no one mock my words, lest thereby wrong
Be done Love's majesty, or touch of shame
Sully his spotless robe. Let silence be my blame.

II.

If any one who once did truly love
Hath lost by death or sad necessity
Of lifelong parting, this my song shall prove
Of meaning all as clear by sympathy
As day itself to him. That soul may tell
How rose to heaven its agonizing cry
From utter desolation's deepest hell,
Asking amid its fires unceasingly
If any good remained or ground of trust
In all the ages: or man's hopes must go,
Even as, ashes to ashes, dust to dust,
His body moulders in the grave below,
To that dim land where all things are forgot,
Where all desire shall fail and love remember not.

III.

Art thou my love? If no, I would none other.
Hard fate forbade me in this world to speak:
My very love bade me my love's voice smother,
And hold my peace although my heart should break.
Sometimes thy gentle eyes, sad memory's creatures,
Gaze on my yearning fancy; then again
I beat my brains to conjure up those features,
And, failing, all my heart is gnawed with pain.
Can love endure for ever separated
From its sweet source? Can hopeless love defy
The heavy hand of Time? All things created
Without their natural sustenance must die.
Shall not those bright days' recollections slowly,
Lost in life's trackless deserts, be forgotten wholly?

IV.

What should I do to keep my love alive?
The heart of man surely did never cherish
A fairer prize. To hold it fast I strive,
Yet daily fear some dear detail doth perish.
I call aloud to heaven in fruitless anguish:
For countless years its pitiless stars have gazed,
While love by slow degrees did fade and languish,
His fair records by wearing time erased.
Oh, if sharp pangs could keep sweet love awake,
And from this heart, with aching want dejected,
The creeping conscious lethargy could shake,
As from the frame by serpent's sting infected,
The fiercest torment would I greet with gladness:
Better, far better pain with love than vacant sadness

V.

Art thou my love? It is a happy dream
To think that somewhere, somewhen, every soul
Shall find its mate: the music of the stream,
The sighing wind, and long waves' solemn roll
Upon the shore, each gentle influence
Of nature seems in her more gracious seasons,
Through every avenue of the enraptured sense,
To pour a host of soft convincing reasons
That take the spirit captive, drowning quite
The sad persistent voice of sober doubt,
And putting sullen unbelief to flight,
Unfold this faith to lover's ear devout:—
For every life somewhere, here or above,
There waits its own peculiar heritage of love.

VI.

Art thou my love? Had I once heard that tale
Thy sweet voice tell, then neither lapse of years
Nor intervening oceans should avail,
But that for ever with importunate tears
And prayers beseeching heaven I would cry
For my lost love. Such piteous eloquence
Would passion lend me, that my misery
Should pierce into the eternal firmament's
Remotest courts, so that for very sadness
Even the song of everlasting peace
The blessèd angels sing, thrilled through with gladness
At their Lord's presence, should die away and cease;
Their Lord Himself, if He be truly loving,
As trembling fancy hopes, should listen unreproving.

VII.

Yet strong in sense of being dear to thee
I could endure my life of thee forlorn,
Although such life an agony would be
Of slowly dragging moments. I should scorn
Myself as all unworthy of thy love,
If in the daily round of mundane tasks,
That duty calls for, haply I should prove
Less than a man 'mongst men; albeit it asks
Almost a hero's strength to bend the will
From tracing those dear memories of the past
Back to the irksome present, and to still
Those echoes in the brain that will outlast
All else beside, coming again, again—
The most delicious pleasure yet intensest pain.

VIII.

I could live on, and face the world unfeeling,
Bearing its blank routine with fortitude ;
My agony of yearning ne'er revealing,
With patience by the thought of thee endued.
Yea even my life's sad burden I could bless
Though I should see thee no more in this life,
If but sometimes the infinite tenderness
Of those pure eyes, amid the weary strife
And turmoil of the crowd, by magic power
Of mighty phantasy conjured back, should rise
And smile within my heart. One single hour
When but fond memory thy place supplies
Is worth a lifetime passed not knowing thee,
Though blessed with every other known felicity.

IX.

I could live on in steadfast hope, and pray
That, may-be after countless dreary years
Of pain and sorrow, there should rise a day
When, purified at last by fire and tears,
My soul might lift herself upon the wings
Of love, and where thou sittest then on high,
Thy rapt eyes commercing with heavenly things,
Like dove to mistress' bosom nestling, fly
To thee, and thou shouldst say with grave sweet smile,
"Welcome my love! I have awaited thee,
Crying unto thy soul a weary while,
Not happy even here till thou wert free."
Oh, cruel heaven, if this may not be so,
To send such dreams in vain, mocking our utter woe.

x.

But now I know not if I am thy love,
Nor ever shall in this unhappy earth—
My soul, like as of old the wandering dove,
Returneth to her narrow ark for dearth
Of any resting-place. The plain so dreary
Of turbid waters far as eye can see
Stretcheth unbroken, and her wings are weary;
There is no land, and whither should she flee?
There are no groves with graceful verdure shrouded;
No tender mate awaits her murmuring
Beneath the leafy covert; heaven beclouded
Broods low upon the waste; no living thing,
With the sweet power of sympathy endued,
Breaketh the dim intolerable solitude.

XI.

I ne'er shall know. A few dear weeks were all
The heavens vouchsafed me of thee: ages long
Of feeling sweet as honey, bitter as gall,
Seemed pent within them; now, like some old song,
They have become a part of the dead past.
The tune will never die from out the mind;
The memory of that melody shall last,
And float upon the pinions of the wind
And on the ocean surges. But, alas!
'Tis but the sorrowful imagination
Of love that fights for life, and will not pass,
Like some deep lutestring's lingering vibration,
Whose pulses thrill the silence. May no sound
That long-drawn agony of keen delight confound!

XII.

A few dear weeks were all. I see thee stand
In that old hall as on the bitter morn
For the last time I trembling took thy hand,
While through the casements came the fiery dawn
Across the level tracts, glowing behind
The limbs of those dark cedars. In thy tone,
Though 'twas, may-be, a fancy of my mind,
As we two stood a moment there alone,
And bade good-bye for ever, seemed to be
A strain of anguish—something deeper far
Than came of ordinary courtesy,
And with our mere stock phrases seemed to jar.
O darling voice, that fancy thou hast given
Is still more dear to me than e'en are hopes of heaven.

XIII.

And so we parted, just as cold bright day
Began to cast his beams across the snow:
Thou to pursue thy life's quiet graceful way
In that sequestered home, with broad pure brow
And loving eyes diffusing happiness
On all around thee; I for many a mile
To sit and hear the weary strain and stress
Of grinding wheel and axle, heart the while
Aching with unremittent agony
Of love unspoken. Ah! how the moments crept,
In lingering pain then, when the miles flew by,
With what a vacant smile the sunlight slept
On the white vestured fields, while every sense
Was all so sick and sore, that each thing seemed offence.

XIV.

We parted, and my heart was stranger still,
To thine, for whom my whole soul craved and cried
In trembling anguish. Ah, what weight of ill,
Borne on the dark inevitable tide
Of future days, cast its o'erhanging shade
On that bright time which thine entrancing eyes,
In fate's despite, with their soft splendours made
Painfully happy, like some paradise,
Where the rapt spirit lying, dreamed away
The golden hours, yet hated all the while
Their pitiless swiftness, bearing on the day
When, like a sharp knife, thy sweet farewell smile
Should pierce my heart, whose bitter stricken cry
Scarcely the quivering lips could utterance deny.

XV.

Wherefore, O cruel heaven, didst thou implant
This all too mighty element of love,
In our frail hearts of flesh,—this burning want
Wherewith the soul, blind to all else, above,
Beneath, around, desires one only thing,
That other human soul, and cannot rest,
Tormented by the ceaseless poignant sting
Of heart-corroding sorrow unconfessed?
Alas! what remedy in earth or heaven
For hopeless love save love's own lingering death?
Ah, remedy how far more bitter even
Than the disease itself! What profiteth
The worn-out soul dull peace from weary strife,
If with love's fleeting breath fleets its own truest life?

XVI.

Of all the shames and sorrows that man's fall
From his first state of liberty and power
Loosed upon earth, the shamefullest of all
I deem, and saddest, yea, the very flower
Of his corruption, this—that men forget.
The love that swelled the heart and filled the eyes
With loving tears fades into pale regret;
And fading slowly, fading surely, dies
At length, and is no more. O Heaven, my will
Makes wild rebellion 'gainst Thy hard decree—
If it be Thine, and not, like other ill,
Our baseness merely. Oh, if time shall be
When that sweet memory shall no longer charm,
Oh let me perish now, now while love's heart is warm.

XVII.

E'en while I think, I see the meek pale dawn
Steal through the casement, filling all the room
With strange half light, as when with curtains drawn,
Like some poor prisoner restless in his gloom,
I lay and longed impatient for the hour
That once again should give thee to mine eyes,
O lovely face, whose sweet mysterious power
And changeful lights made day one long surprise.
Yet when that hour had come, 'twas equal pain,
When the heart swelled in one great wave towards thee,
To sit in silence. Ah, no soothing rain
Of tears can still the heaving of that sea,
Nor day nor night bring its sad waves repose,
Moaning with secret woe that it may ne'er disclose.

XVIII.

O ruthless day, that with thy cold clear light
Tranquilly shining round that dainty head
Mockedst despair with unattainable height
Of far removed desire! Words are not said
Which can declare thine utter bitterness:
O near and yet so far; so near, that hand,
With bright good-morrow given, hand may press,
And yet as far off as the silent land
Beyond the stars. Ah, while slow suns did creep,
How the heart longed that night were come again,—
Merciful night, on whose breast it might weep
Its passion forth, and ease its pent up pain!
Yet when night came, how the fond heart did ache,
Desiring day's return for that sweet vision's sake!

XIX.

How often when that silvery laugh hath rung,
Like delicate fairy chimes that sound in dreams,
The passionate words have trembled on my tongue
That, still sometimes my daring fancy deems,
Perchance had made us one. O foolish thought,
This pain is all too gentle chastisement
For thy presumption. Thinkest thou heaven wrought
For thee this flawless jewel, and subtly blent
All varying tints and shades of loveliness
In one consummate glory,—thee that art
Scarce worthy e'en to love her, how much less
Of being loved again? O selfish heart,
Give humble thanks to Heaven that did give
Thy soul in that pure light a little while to live.

XX.

Yet doth love's voice, low murmuring at my side,
In accents sweet as thine oft whisper me,—
Of all his children love is justified
Not less than wisdom, and that e'en of thee
My love is worthy; though without his might,
That glorifies the meanest and most base,
I were so dark beside the dazzling light
Reflected heaven lends that perfect face,
That e'en in dreams that know themselves for dreams,
To couple thoughts of my poor self and thee
Were rankest profanation. Ah, meseems
That love so true as mine is cannot be,
E'en to the royalty of that soul queen-born,
An offering only meet for the cold glance of scorn.

XXI.

Yet were I ten times worthier than I am,
True love could never wish that thou shouldst share
My hard lot in the rough world. It were blame
To him that plucked the tender rose from where,
Fanned by soft winds, and washed in fragrant dew,
She bloomed in sweet perfection, whose fair head
No harsh and blusterous gale could visit through
The close kind hedge around her garden bed,
And to the fretful gloom of the dark city
Bore her to pine and sigh forth weary breath,
Where 'mid the loud throng, without pause or pity,
Straining existence jars its way to death.
Stay, stay, rash hand! Shall not a loving heart
Silently, for love's sake, endure its bitter smart?

XXII.

And so I spoke not. That 'twas all unmeet
To link thy glorious gifts to my poor fate,
Stern honour whispered; and beside 'twas sweet
To stand a little while at heaven's gate,
To one who might not enter, and, if I spake,
E'en this might be forbidden, and I must part
For ever from the heaven whose spell I brake
With my presumptuous utterance. My heart
Was wholly thine, and if I erred, dear love,
Keeping it from thee, this must be my pleading,—
The depth of my devotion it doth prove,
That I was silent when my heart was bleeding
For love of thee. Rather all pain were mine
Than that dull wearying care should mar that face divine.

XXIII.

But though 'tis duty's voice that biddeth me
For ever turn my longing eyes away
From their one hope, meseems in losing thee
I lose the light from heaven, the one bright ray
That lit my lonely life, and all is night.
How weary and unmeaning is this world
To the sad spirit that, meshed in its mid-flight
By webs of adverse circumstance, hath furled
Its wings in hopelessness! To think what this
My life had been, how fair, if only one
Sweet soul had shared it. Now existence is
A labyrinth for which no clue is spun,
A cruel riddle wherewith infinite power,
Like fabled Sphynx of old, beguiles man's fleeting hour.

XXIV.

Maybe I should have spoken, for one night,
I well remember, one at random singing,
Now this, now that, to please us, chanced to light
Upon a song whose lines, like wild bells ringing
That mingle notes of joy and sorrow at strife,
Told how, love's sweet once tasted, from thenceforth
The bitterest possible pang that future life
Can hold in store, the most implacable wrath
Of hostile fortune, is too slight a thing
To be accounted aught. While others hearkened
Listlessly, round the singer clustering,
I sat apart within a corner darkened
By shade of pendant drapery, and, free
From observation's weary burden, marked but thee.

XXV.

Thy face was as an angel's. In thine eyes,
Seen through half-tears, there sat a wistful light
Like twilight glimmer long before sunrise,
Glory unutterably exquisite
Of deep desire and patience : through them seemed
To look a noble lonely soul, a queen
That sat forlorn in grandeur. I have dreamed
How often, oh how often, of that scene,
And longed to say, Dear heart, be quite, quite sure
That there is one to love thee; rest content,
Confident that, while life and thought endure,
That love's abiding power shall ne'er be spent,
Like a lone star whose steadfast fire doth light
With its bright purity some waste abyss of night.

XXVI.

Would thou couldst know! some wild despairing voice
Whispers within, and ever beaten back
Recurs again. For might not both rejoice,
Walking in after-years life's toilsome track,
To think the ill-starred love, which never knew
On earth its full fruition, still prevailing,
Triumphant over lengthening absence, grew
The ground tone of existence, nought availing
To quell its deep endurance? Dreams of thee
Alone and weary, whether I sleep or wake,
Sadden my fancy; yet, O mystery,
Of love and self-love blent, I cannot shake
Quite from my heart the hope that thou shalt be,
So long as life shall last, only beloved by me.

XXVII.

O holy radiance, purity divine,
'Tis hard to think that thou shalt never guess
What silent prayers I utter at thy shrine,
Feasting my soul upon thy loveliness.
The expre[illegible] to its object of its praise,
Is adoration's most essential part.
Alas! the worship of my nights and days
Is but an image mirrored in my heart.
The thought is wild and selfish, yet I long
That thou couldst know I love thee, for I know
Thy heart with tender pity beats so strong,
At least thou shouldst compassionate my woe,
Nor chide my rash presumption too severely,
Whose only crime toward thee is loving thee too dearly.

XXVIII.

Such dreams are idle, for the blank day comes
And scatters all their brightness; as it breaks
The roaring life-stream of the huge town drums
Within my shrinking ears again, and makes
Heart and brain sick and dizzy. Whence procure,
O heaven, I know not, some scant store of strength
To face the joyless present, and endure
The creeping seasons' agonizing length.
Life's music all is fled when once the string
Of hope is snapt. Like harp in unused room,
The soul lies silent; no one more shall sing
And wake sweet answers from its chords, but gloom,
The child of joy that hath for ever fled,
Broods over all around. Bright hope is dead, is dead.

XXIX.

Can memory for ever feed the flame
Of love bereft the food of his desire,
Revolving slowly o'er and o'er the same
Dear recollections? Shall his dying fire,
Moment by moment fading, leave behind
A little ghastly dust as all his trace,
Trembling before the slightest breath of wind?
O ye sweet heavens, hearken; if your grace
Be not a foolish vain imagining
Man fashions for himself, hear this one prayer.
Oh, let me not forget,—nay, rather wring
My heart with all the tortures of despair,
Than that true love should have been born in vain,
And chill oblivion's flood o'er all triumphant reign.

XXX.

Oh, let me not become, by lapse of years,
Merely the same as if love had not been;
Let not the soul, once softened by love's tears,
Grow dull and cold and full of cynic spleen
'Gainst self and fate, missing love's sacred glow,
Itself its prison, loathing day by day
Its living death, yet fallen all too low
To hope again, to weep too hard, to pray
Too restless, dragging on a weary space
Self-centred, yet self-hating. I have seen
Dim eyes that looked from many a fading face,
And seemed to say, haply it may have been
That once we loved, but 'tis so long ago,
An age of sad stagnation, that we scarcely know.

XXXI.

Nor let me be again, as once, the slave
  Of every fleeting instant, as when thought
Flitted on random wing, and nothing gave
  To life a deep significance, nor brought
Its flying phases into unity.
  The soul one moment lit with holy fire
On trembling wings seemed in high heaven to fly;
  The next, alas! it grovelled in the mire,
Its transports all forgot. Such is not life,
  Though beauty lavish on the vivid sense
Her fairest pictures: all is but a strife
  Of jarring incoherent elements,
Like the wild murmurs that through Chaos ran
Before the solemn music of the spheres began.

XXXII.

'Tis said, the mind, by ceaseless meditation,
Becomes like that which it doth meditate :
Oh, may my soul by thy sweet contemplation
Become still liker thee, her high estate
Thus winning back of liberty and power,—
No longer swayed by every fickle breath
Of fresh sensation, growing hour by hour
Stronger and purer and nobler until death.
As moonbeams, struggling through the clouded night,
Strike in a crowd on some sad face of shame
Like Heaven's lingering mercy, so thy light
Struck on my soul, wandering without aim
And lonely through time's waste, and love of thee,
From bonds of self and sense set me for ever free.

XXXIII.

Sometimes upon a sudden in my dreams
A trumpet rings through heaven, and the souls
Rise up before the judgment-seat. Meseems,
Thou, sitting midst the clustering aureoles
Of God's elect, beholdest, and a voice
Breaking the stillness saith, "All is forgiven
Because He truly loved;" and I rejoice,
Glorying to think that all the hosts of heaven
Shall know thy loveliness the instrument
Of heaven's most loving mercy. Then thy face
Fades in far distance; fancy's power is spent;
The bitter thought comes in a little space,
That I shall ne'er behold that form again
Here or hereafter, and the heart faints sick with pain.

XXXIV.

A mocking voice rings ever in my ears :
"Wherefore should love continue to exist,
If all the long train of the future years
Brings no fresh meeting? Love his mark hath missed.
What boots it then sad memories to cherish,
Weakening the heart with uncontrolled desire?
Let unavailing recollection perish,
And love that hath been born in vain expire.
To live but in the past with fond regrets,
Matching thy feeble will with fate's decree,
Is but the part of weakness, such as sets
Its highest heaven in baseless phantasy.
Front thou the truth, and bid thy dreams farewell,
Content with sober-faced reality to dwell.

XXXV.

"Ay, let the spirit struggle: yet there runs
A strain of weakness through the weary flesh,
And by the process of swift circling suns
Thy love shall fade at last. Then, kindling fresh,
Shall other hopes and fancies warm thy brain.
Life without love that reaps love's perfect fruit
Is reft of half its life. 'Tis all in vain,
Cherishing hopeless love to pay thy suit
To void dreams, the dead past's pining brood,
And so from actual daily life remove
All taste of that which is life's truest food,
Growing experience of living love.
True wisdom lies in clinging to the best
That's possible to us, and letting pass the rest."

XXXVI.

O cruel voice, when with thy chilling breath
Thou witherest the tender flowers that grow
About the grave where sleeps the untimely death
Of buried hope, as if some sudden blow
Took from the dazed brain all capacity
Of thought or action, dull despair doth master
Each vital power; memory doth lie
In deathly torpor; ever fast and faster
Love's life seems ebbing. Suddenly, oh wonder
Of love's deep might, with strong returning thrill
He leaps to life again; the clouds asunder
Parting, as in a mirror calm and still
The living image of that perfect face
Gazes upon my soul with sweet rebukeful grace.

XXXVII.

Ah, me! What should it profit that the heart,
Weary of craving, sought a remedy
In other hopes, and each recurring smart
Of fond remembrance put for ever by,
If haply in that land beyond the grave
Those eyes' reproach should make my soul despair,
And I should learn too late that love doth save
His best and highest gifts to lavish there
On faith triumphant? Or, if it should be,
The mortal thread once snapt, that nought remain
Or not a trace of old mortality
And all its hopes? Then wherefore love again—
Again forget? Dear eyes, thus ever chide
The thought that bartered you for love that may not bide.

XXXVIII.

But yet the vision fades, although the heart
Bids straining memory rack the jaded brain
With strong despairing effort. It doth depart,
The dull cloud settles on the mind again,
Again the sad voice whispers: "Now art thou
Alone for ever; through all the weary years
Doomed to think on 'mid silence drifting slow,
No heart to feel with thine, no gentle tears
Shed for thy sorrows; 'neath an outward face
Of feigned calm, stoically crushing down
An agony of unrest; no thought, no place,
For long endurable; the thronging town
The secret chamber, lonely mountain-side,
Hateful alike with weariness unsatisfied.

XXXIX.

"Thou art alone; there is no love for thee;
No sympathy in earth, or sea, or sky;
The imprisoned spirit fretting can but see
The iron walls of personality
That circle round its solitary cell.
Thou sayest, perchance, poor fool, that there is love
Divine in highest heaven seated. Well,
Granted thus much, the mighty Lord above
Looks on the myriad starry groups that swarm,
And million billion beings working out
Each one his fate; with high compassion calm
And mercy long forbearing, make no doubt,
He pitieth the creatures of his clay,
The feeble heirs of imperfection and decay.

XL.

"Shall this content thee? See, the swarming place,
This mighty Babel, like a mere speck gleams
Upon the enormous earth's side, while through space
Slantwise she spins, and earth herself but seems
A speck amid creation. Think what ages
Lie fossilized within the thinnest crust
Upon her surface, what innumerous pages
Of life's sad book for ever turned: the dust
We tread with thoughtless footsteps will not say
What multitudinous forms of teeming life
It once embodied. Day succeeds to day;
The elemental forces, still at strife
Through the long process of eternities,
Build up new forms of life by invisible degrees."

XLI.

O scornful voice, there is no great, no small;
A thousand ages are as yesterday
Unto the Infinite Soul that maketh all.
The scoffing answer comes without delay;
"Thou speakest truth indeed: there is no great
Where all are small alike. Trembling we stand
Like flickering shadows of a dream, and wait
Our little moment on time's narrow strand.
The sad scorn of the pitying Infinite
Looks on the tumult of the hurrying years,
As backward into gloom they wing their flight,
With their dead burdens of past hopes and fears
That are for ever vain; as clouds they pass,
Leaving no trace upon a waveless sea like glass.

XLII.

"Shall this content thee? Was there no fond dream
Of love, to which thy love in answer given,
That perfect unison of love should seem
More priceless than aught else in earth or heaven?
To Him, within the hollow of whose hand
The universe with all its circling spheres
Is but a tiny grain of fleeting sand,
Is thy love aught? Think, if in after-years
A time should come when in the sum of all
Thy unit hath no place, would any sense
Of loss or faintest shade of sorrow fall
Upon the stillness of Omnipotence?
Thou art alone: then wherefore cling to life?
In death is everlasting rest from grief and strife."

XLIII.

Surely that Power, the bursting heart replies,
Which made the soul of man can understand
The wants Himself created. Starry skies,
The long waves' hollow thunder on the strand,
The wind that o'er the lonely wilderness
Sweepeth at eventide,—why should these fill
The heart with restless longings, if to bless
Some time its deep desires be not His will?
I cannot think that Wisdom Infinite,
Seeing the dumb clay helpless at His feet,
Could take it, and with cruel skilful sleight
Of plastic art fashion a creature meet
For hope and trust and love, merely intending
That all in mouldering death should find their mournful ending.

XLIV.

He gave that strong desire for sympathy
Pre-eminent from one sweet human soul:
I trust, I cannot choose but trust, that He,
The Almighty, when He shall have wrought the whole
Of His high purpose out, at length shall bring
Those souls together that on earth have striven
To love in changeless faith, and they shall sing
His praises in His everlasting heaven,—
Two voices one in perfect harmony;
And every corner of the universe
Bathed in the sunshine of pure love shall lie,
For ever ransomed from the ancient curse.
O God, with bliss my heart doth palpitate:
I hear e'en now the anthem peal through heaven's gate.

XLV.

Why should I seek the silent courts of death?
'Tis sweet to live, although I see her not
In the same world—to feel the gentle breath
Of the same wind that crossed perchance the spot
Where still she tends her flowers. The very sun
Looks brighter to me when I think it shines
Upon her also; and when day is done,
The glimmering sky, barred with long purple lines
At twilight, fills my eyes with burning tears,
Not all unhappy, when in thought meseems
She gazes too, musing on bygone years.
So every hour hath its golden dreams;
For while she lives beneath the self-same sky,
Existence is not altogether misery.

XLVI.

I can live on and wait. Reproachful duty
Shall use her gentle accents, wear her face ;
The pure sunlight of her celestial beauty
Shall drive away each lurking, lingering trace
Of aught that is unworthy of her love.
So shall my every thought be hers, and yet
Life shall not altogether fruitless prove,
Misspent in merely fond and vain regret.
" Dream thou," the voice replies, " what dream thy will
Dictates, or fickle fancy pleases best :
Fancy is free to all. Remember still
'Tis but a dream, and thou art all unblest,
Tottering alone upon time's narrow ridge
Above the awful void that thought can never bridge.

XLVII.

"The souls, thou sayest, that have loved on earth:
Thou only knowest that thyself hast loved
And lost, and soon thou diest. What new birth
Cometh, when patient ages have improved
Upon thy type, thou shalt not see in dust
Of bygone races, brute and human, lying.
O Wisdom kind, that gave thee power to trust,
Not knowing"—Cease, cease, cruel voice, thy crying.
O God our Father, I need Thy help to bear
The lonely hours, like torture of slow fire.
My need is far too great that I should fear.
With this great burthen of unfulfilled desire,
Before Thine infinite pity, prone I fall.
I utter Thee no prayer: Thou understandest all.

XLVIII.

Behold, O Lord, what do we know on earth
Higher than love that rightly bears love's name?
Not inconsiderate passion's lawless birth,
But the true soul's devotion, which nor shame,
Nor slight, nor pain, nor the heart sickening strife
Of weary years can chill; which doth not seek
Chiefly its own desire, but findeth life
In perfect self-surrender; which is meek
And pitiful, and yearneth to be loved,
Yet, rooted in unswerving faithfulness,
Endures its lonely fate like rock unmoved
Amid the wild waves' never-ceasing stress.
Art thou so good, and hath such love no home,
Either in earth below, or that far world to come?

XLIX.

"So good—What is God's goodness? Disposition
(Dissect and trace it to the very roots
I' the human mind) to answer man's petition,
Changing each day, each moment, as it suits
The varying needs and fresh experience
Of human nature? Doth the savage pray
For spiritual graces? In what sense
Thinks he God good when on some battle-day
Drunken with hate he shrieks for victory
Over some neighbour tribe that has encroached
Upon his hunting ground? What sympathy
With all man's wants! How easily approached,
Since every stage of man's development
Finds corresponding change in the Divine intent!

L.

"Ay; feed thy heart upon that well-worn theme
Of man's conceit, his immortality.
Comfort thyself: 'tis well that thou shouldst deem,
Poor shade, thy paltry personality
Eternal being. Fashion thee thy God
Like to thyself from thine own consciousness,
But somewhat nobler. Tremble at His nod
When thee thy guilty self offendeth; bless
His saving grace when self-complacency
Tells thee thou art divine. Inflame thy heart
With all the brightest transports piety
To fervent devotee could e'er impart.
This truth remains as clear as eye can see,
Thyself art still the measure of His divinity.

LI.

"What marvel such a God is wondrous kind
To man's high gifted race? His own elect,
Foreknown in deep of His eternal mind
Before the ages were, who did select
This tiny satellite among the maze
Of circling suns to be the central spot
In all the universe, the highest phase
Of His creative power. Nay, question not.
Man in the long chain of development,
That goes from dust up to the infinite mind,
Deeming himself last link, did faith invent
To still the doubts that curious brain might find.
Faith, not in God,—nay, analyze it well,—
Faith in himself the truth would far more nearly tell."

LII.

O faithless spirit, thou thyself hast given
An answer that confutes thy argument.
Thy "somewhat nobler" opes the road to heaven:
What other power that consciousness hath lent
Save Most High God? If man's own spirit alone
Inspired himself, himself then needs must be
His best and noblest: wherefore should he own
A higher? The noblest of humanity
Would be the last to make their own ideal
Merely themselves. Say from what source I know
That was the fairest, purest, and most leal
Of all the souls that in this world below
I ever lighted on? How should the eye
See with no light save that its own self may supply?

LIII.

Prate not that good but signifies the sense
Of admiration in the human mind
By centuries of slow experience
Begot for that which general man doth find
Conducive most unto his happiness.
Would I that, being noble as she is,
The weight of keenest sorrow should oppress
That gentle bosom or unclouded bliss
Should shine upon her life, she bating aught
Of her perfection? I had liefer part
For ever from the sweetest face that thought
Can image in this world, than deem the heart
Which hidden source of such fair show did seem
Should be one whit less fair than fancy's fondest dream.

LIV.

If this be so of individual case,
Shall it not hold in general? None deny,
The best is he who loves the most his race,
And for the happiness of humanity
Is most content to suffer. Ask of those
Who fit this standard best, and are most sad
At others' suffering, if they could choose,
Man, being happy, should continue bad,
Or, suffering ever, rise in moral height,
Which lot they would elect. On their replies
I stake my faith in Heaven. The tenderest light
Of pity that e'er looked from human eyes
Looks to my soul response so sternly sweet
As makes the very question seem almost unmeet.

LV.

"Would part for ever, thou say'st," the voice replies;
"Still hugging to thy breast the baseless hope
That in some far off heaven faith descries
Thine individual wish shall be the scope
Of God's provision. Nay, then, granted thee,
As fruit of thy fantastic subtleties,
That God is as men would that He should be,
Good as their apprehension it may please.
Thine argument is not advanced one whit.
Deem'st thou the thought that like a little wave
Rippling a shallow rainpool now doth flit
Across thy being's surface still shall have
Succeeding æons after æons hence,
When all things wane beside, eternal permanence?

LVI.

"When death his icy fingers once hath laid
Upon life's fragile clay-built tenement
What then remaineth? Whither thence hath fled
The bright inhabitant that daily bent
The dull earth to his uses? Why suppose,
The necessary instrument of life
Being worn out or broken, that the close
Of all is not? When after each day's strife
The bodily powers are held by gentle sleep
In sweet suspension, or some deadly swound
Doth the frail senses in oblivion steep
And blank unconsciousness of all around,
Doth the eternal essence then, set free
From corporal clog, exert its high capacity?

LVII.

"The master worker fashioning his clay
Works ever upward, shape succeeding shape
In endless series, and there comes a day,
The shameful semblance of the mouthing ape
Shall seem no stranger matched with human kind,
Nor loathlier than thou shalt set beside
The last conception of the eternal mind.
It needs must be thy tender nerves are tried
With fond impulse of hope, and love, and trust,
That in the ascending scale may some day rise
The nobler organism from out thy dust.
Thus by the law divine of sacrifice,
Death is life's food and individual woe
Of higher birth to come the inevitable throe.

LVIII.

" Yea, God is good, and towards that infinite good
Nature the finite evermore doth strive.
Her path through the eternities is strewed
With bygone types, whose elements still live
In other forms transmuted. As she goes,
The rays from the still far-off glory shine
On her advancing figure, and she throws
The shadow of evil backward on the line
Of her advance. Whether when thou art dead,
Thy vital spark is quenched or shall again
Forgetful then of that old life it led,
In some fresh shape to higher growth attain,
It is the same, thy love is but a pace
In being's onward journey left behind in space."

LIX.

I cannot answer ; all the power of speech
Fainteth within me, for the icy wind
That breathes across time's desert plains, where bleach
The bones of long forgotten human kind,
Sickens my brain with whispers of despair.
The ghosts of vanished creeds and empires rise
In sad procession through the gloomy air,
And chill the blood with hollow spectral eyes,
Wailing, "we deemed each one in that old time
That he was last and highest ; now our place
Another holdeth in his golden prime,
While we are empty shades ; the very face
Of earth seems strange. Why dost thou break our rest,
Peering in that dark land wherein we sleep unblest ?"

LX.

Nay then, like evil dreams, why will ye rise
To vex the soul that lies too faint with pain
To banish you? Sphinxes with awful eyes
That sleep not, sad with knowing all in vain
The mystery that ne'er shall be revealed
While sun and moon endure; grim monstrous forms,
Half brute, half human, at whose feet once kneeled
The evil kings of old with their dark swarms
Of trembling votaries. Where are they now,
Nimrod and Pharaoh? In some long-lost tombs
A little powder, while the whirlwinds blow
The desert sand above their ancient homes.
Where are the crowds that worshipped in their halls,
The hearts that hoped and feared within their city walls?

LXI.

Whither are gone the beautiful and strong—
The brave and fair, whose lives of old have made
The page of story bright with matchless song?
Does Helen now with tender blame upbraid
Her Paris on that distant unknown shore,
Or proud Elissa weep her fate in vain?
Where are the loving hearts which now no more
Move on this earth, making the brows of pain
Glorious with mournful light? No loving voice
Breaketh the eternal stillness of the grave;
There is no sound of any that rejoice
In the dim courts of death, nor murmur save
The worm slow gnawing. Cease from man whose breath
Is in his nostrils; like the beasts he perisheth.

LXII.

O God, to think the narrow house of death
Shall hold that form whose every movement takes
My spirit captive; those sweet lips whose breath
Is the deep well-spring where love thirsting slakes
His burning need; those eyes whose sudden look
Goes to my heart like sharp and piercing brand,
Or whose more settled gaze is like a book
In which I read high heavenly things; that hand
Whose slightest touch upon the proffered arm
Sends through each nerve an impulse of delight,—
To think that these shall perish, every charm
Mouldering in slow corruption out of sight!
O thought that makes the tissue of the brain,
With sharp spasm quiver of unutterable pain!

LXIII.

O dreadful gulf of unknown destiny
And inconceivable! in bygone years
Man's craving fancy fondly peopled thee
With visible creatures of his hopes and fears,
Far happier in his simple certainty
Than we with all our knowledge, only knowing
That we know not. Our subtle wits deny
To faith all form, with merciless logic showing
Our heaven is but earth idealized.
On transient hope waits bitter questioning,
"Is this the very truth? this dream so prized,
Canst thou believe it as a visible thing
Seen daily with the bodily eye? Ah, no,
'Tis but a shade thought throws upon the void below."

LXIV.

To live alone without love on the earth
And die and be forgotten! O gracious heaven,
What flaming pang of hell, what morbid birth
Of hideous thought to sin-sick conscience given
Can equal this in horror? In youth's days
The soul is self-enamoured; rosy dreams
Wait on her footsteps, and the golden haze
Of early morning; all creation seems
Like land of promise stretched before her eyes.
The time comes when dull grey succeeds to rose,
Unto the grey black darkness, and she lies
Shuddering in stagnant gloom, alone, and knows
She is alone, and not a voice doth speak,
The torture of her hopeless solitude to break.

LXV.

And must I die, and all my love be vain?
Oh, of all dooms that man's cheek ever blenched
Conceived in fancy, the intensest pain,
Worm that dies not, and fire that is not quenched,
The death that knows no afterwards doth wear
The ghastliest face for me. Can language tell
What agony of impotent despair
Possesseth them whose lonely spirits dwell
With thoughts of such a death, and none is near,
No loving hand to soothe the aching head,
No loving eyes the sinking heart to cheer,
No loving soul to share the hours of dread?
More terrible than this can anything
Exist within the power of man's imagining?

LXVI.

As thus I muse forlorn, and painful chords
Of o'erstrained feeling through the vext brain jar,
Sudden there seems a sound of solemn words
To grow through the confusion from afar;
As by some vivid flash of consciousness,
A picture rises to my inward eye;
The bodily senses might almost confess
It was no vision, but reality;
The vaulted roof, the fretted altar-screen,
With quaintly carven fruits and flowers appear,
The great east window glorious with sheen
Of painted saint and angel; all as clear,
Called up from the dead past by memory,
As the last time, beloved, that there I knelt with thee.

LXVII.

Meseems 'tis Easter Day: thy face is bright,
As with the presence of the risen Lord,
And from thy self-forgetful eyes a light
Of softest, holiest purity is poured.
No saint by painter's subtle art pourtrayed,
Rapt in devotion's highest ecstasy,
No angel fair in glistering robes arrayed
Seemed ever half so beautiful to me.
And while I listen breathless through the hush
Of solemn silence following after prayer,
I seem to hear the hollow organ gush
Full throated music on the throbbing air.
O God, that thus for ever at thy side,
Thrilled through with thy sweet influence, I might abide.

LXVIII.

Ah me! how easy was it then to pray,
When thanks and praise welled up spontaneously
To God who made so fair a face! That day
Within the spirit-world it seemed to me,
Thy spirit took mine by the hand, and led
Right up to heaven, where the warmest light
From the pure wells of infinite love was shed,
And all creation trembled in my sight
Across the haze of lustre. Now apart
From thee I cannot pray, for when I try
Some fierce tormenting thought distracts my heart,
And stifles utterance with despairing cry
Of bitter accusation of hard fate:
With bleeding hands I beat in vain at heaven's blank gate.

LXIX.

Yet when thy form in memory thus doth rise,
The darkest visions from my spirit fly;
The soul that looks out from those fearless eyes
Such depth of heavenly love can never die.
Within the glowing sunshine of thy glance
Death's grisly visage casts no shade of fear;
O'er that charmed circle doubt may not advance,
Nor dark despair breathe that bright atmosphere.
The painful knot reason could not untie,
With one strong stroke, wheeling on mighty wings,
Love shears asunder: with exulting cry,
The soul set free from its dark bondage springs.
Dear face, I need no proof of heaven but thee;
Thou art my living pledge of immortality.

LXX.

I cannot think, belovèd, that the heart
Which holds my own in such imperial sway,
Though cruel fate and hateful distance part
Us from each other many a weary day,
Is but a cunning instrument and thought
Its movement ruled by hard mechanic laws,
Mere aggregate of wandering atoms brought
Together by chance or by some hidden cause
Inherent in material elements,
A heartless, soulless, blind necessity;
No wilful reasoning this the mind invents
To prove foregone conclusion. Time may fly
Its onward course to all eternity;
I cannot dream of time when thou hast ceased to be.

LXXI.

If everlasting progress be the law
Of all creation, and in His works God strive
Towards His own perfection evermore,
Willing that age succeeding age may give
A still more glorious embodiment
Of his creative thought, there yet should be
Some sense of failure with that progress blent,
Marring the counsels of infinity,
If individual consciousness should fall
And perish by the way. If any being
Become obliterate from the sum of all
That had within itself the power of seeing
Evil and good, surely some touch of shame
And wrong would blur the brightness of the Eternal's name.

LXXII.

When faith, hard pressed, can scarcely hold her own,
And all the spirit sickens with the pain
Of oft-recurring doubt, the thought alone
That thou, even thou, believest can sustain
My fainting soul. I cannot all despair
While the soft rays of trusting hope still stream
From those belovèd eyes. I cannot bear
To think thy faith should be but idle dream;
That the low music of thy pleading voice,
Which raised my soul as on slow waving wing
Of soaring cherub, made no heaven rejoice,
Such sweet and pure devotion hearkening.
Meseems my very need of thee doth show,
Abiding in the heavens, a source of love below.

LXXIII.

I could suppose that the majestic frame
Of this far-stretching mighty universe
Existed uncreate: the fervent flame
Of the unwearied sun that doth rehearse
God's glory in the heavens day by day
Is but Himself His golden splendour's source:
Earth, moon, and stars, in their fixed course obey
No other lord but blind material force.
Tell me no tender care for man conceives
Bright spring with delicate mist of timid buds,
Strong summer's wreath of overshadowing leaves,
And autumn's fiery pageant in the woods;
Let this sad doctrine dreary science prove,
I none the less shall think that God created love.

LXXIV.

Again the sad voice whispers in my ear:
"Let wilful fancy leap fate's barriers,
And man's spirit range through sphere succeeding sphere
Of future being. Say then if memory stirs
The mind with any echo of past state,
Of former life in which thy spirit moved.
There is no sound: nay death-in-birth's dark gate
Hath closed on all thou may'st perchance have loved
Or hated in that long-forgotten land
Of pre-existence. Dost thou fondly deem
Love's form, that on the fast receding strand
Stretches sad arms across the broadening stream,
In future life shall on some distant shore,
Bosom to bosom close, be clasped thine own once more?

LXXV.

" Dost thou conceive, if in this present state
Some other orb of altered circumstance
Had ringed thy life, and it had pleased thy fate
That on this mortal pathway thou shouldst chance
On wholly other times and seasons and places
Than those in which thy spirit now hath moved,
On wholly other hearts and souls and faces
Than any in this lifetime thou hast loved,
Thyself still being the same,—thinkest thou that none
Of all the thousands of bright souls that range
This fair earth's spacious tracts save only one
Could make thy soul love's captive? All is change:
Thy changeless love is but a general need
That as the chance of life gives sustenance doth feed.

LXXVI.

"Why then suppose that after thy new birth
Into the unknown world beyond the grave
The old love that ruled thy spirit here on earth,
Rising again before thee, still shall have
Its ancient power? Surely this world's relations,
Its hope and fear, its joy and sorrow and strife,
Are but the transitory preparations
That lead us up unto the absolute life
Hereafter, when the individual soul,
Bursting its narrow limits like a flood,
Shall mingle with the illimitable whole,
Conscious alone of universal good.
Shall any shadow from this earthly ball
Upon that plenitude supreme of glory fall?"

LXXVII.

O joyless prospect, that scarce other seems
Than mere annihilation. All we know,
Our love, our joys, our fears, and hopes, and dreams,
Are portions of ourselves, and, as we grow,
Ourselves but sum of our experience.
The very heart of life in noblest minds,
Is the deep-rooted solemn sorrowful sense
Of personality that strongly binds
The sheaf of consciousness. The man who, flying
From old love's mournful face to new delight,
Turns back on his past self, and blots the dying
Record of bygone longings from his sight,—
Whate'er he is, he only seems to me
Outcast from all that gives man's life its dignity.

LXXVIII.

There is no comfort for man's soul, nor peace,
In aught that fades. Life should be one long pas
sion
Of grief and dread, if all we are must cease,
From life's book blotted, and time for ever fashion
Our old selves into new. Man's deepest craving
Is for some fixed estate which, as the rock
Abides amid the weltering billows' raving,
Shall evermore abide, from which no shock
Of battling elements, nor slow decay
With soft insidious fingers silently
Working her task of ruin day by day,
Can e'er remove. If earthly love shall die.
And have no part in that new life to come,
Then would I rather death were my eternal home.

LXXIX.

I cannot think that it was chance alone
Made our paths meet. If any Providence
O'erlooks men's lives, and in deep ways unknown
To human wisdom educates the sense
Of nobleness and goodness in the mind,
Surely not chance. When the sad light of thought
Chastened by suffering shines on the past, I find
How deep deliverance love of thee hath wrought.
Thy soul to mine was like the guiding star
Which rose of old before the awestruck eyes
Of Eastern kings, pointing to where afar
The Presence that the long ages yearned for lies—
The hope for which earth's utmost corners pine—
Hushed by the slowly drawn deep breath of sleeping kine.

LXXX.

If, then, it be not chance that on this earth
So twines the threads of human destiny
That all life's moments from dim dawn of birth
Like footsteps are that some unknown decree
Compels through vast enormous wildernesses
To where that other life's sacred feet shall pass
Across the way, whose supreme influence blesses
The rest of life's long journey, even, alas!
Although those paths must soon diverge again,—
If this be so, may be, though trembling love
Can scarcely breathe his hope for sharp heart pain
Of sudden dread lest it should baseless prove,
The self-same power upon death's distant shore
With that one life's sweet presence shall glad the sight
once more.

LXXXI.

Ah, then what thrilling glow of pure delight,
The soul's long bitter hunger shall assuage!
What happy tears shall burn in eyes whose night
The eternal morning breaketh! All life's rage
And conflict of tumultuous emotion
Is stilled for ever; like the distant hum
Its memory seems of some soft rippling ocean
Stroking its shingle; for at length the sum
Of all our past experience doth merge
In deep tranquillity of perfect bliss.
O Love, my daring fancy on the verge
Of that far land feels thy sweet welcoming kiss,
For whose desire my fainting heart doth cry
In vain, and days and nights are one long agony.

LXXXII.

Yet is it bitter when life's youthful flood
Still strongly beats in every bounding vein,
And fierce love-longings stir the fervent blood
With strange wild leaps of sudden passion and pain
To yield up earthly hope! When earth should seem
Most glorious in life's lusty summertide,
Day should be one long hope, and night one dream
Of hope fulfilled, that then life's sun should hide
His visage from the happy fields, the song
Of birds should cease, and all the brightness die,
With sense of thwarted nature and deep wrong
So loads the heart as almost to defy
Faith's power to bear it. Yet my heart is fain
To trust, in spite of all, life is not spent in vain.

LXXXIII.

Three times the kind cruel fates on me bestowed
The exquisite joy that was twin-born with pain
Of being near thee: once when summer glowed
In blinding light on burning hill and plain;
Once when in spring the plover's plaintive call
Haunted the trackless regions of the air,
Where the bright beck's soft tinkling waters fall
Down through the breezy pastures wild and bare;
And once, and last, in winter, when fierce frost
Held the numb earth in his relentless grasp.
Ah, me, the sweetest season of all was lost,—
No happy autumn profferred me to clasp
The perfect fruit of love whose nutriment
The sharp heart-hunger satisfies with deep content.

LXXXIV.

Winter's embrace relaxing setteth free
Earth's prisoned forces : fair shy primrose flowers
Begem the woodlands ; every shrub and tree,
Warmed by mild suns, and fed with genial showers,
Thrills with returning vigour. Me alone
Perpetual winter holds, and through my brain
Old memories ever make despairing moan,
As o'er the blank bare fields its sad refrain
The chill blast wails and whines. To my sad heart,
Where thou art not 'tis winter ; only now
And now again the murky wrack will part,
And some bright gleam of distant heaven show,
While to the ear some murmuring breeze will bring
A low delicious whisper as of far-off spring.

LXXXV.

Yet even if that darker voice be true,
And I shall sleep without awakening,
And on death's night no dawn's wan glimmering blue
Shall palpitate with upward brightening
Of rosy-tinted flushes,—yet, I say,
E'en on the brink of drear eternity,
'Tis well to have loved; in that love's little day
My spirit triumphs, e'en although I die.
For every consciousness of high intent,
And every longing for the good and pure,
All love and sense of loveliness, is blent
With thought of her; and whether my soul endure
Or perish for ever, that love still to me
Was the supremest gift in Heaven's high treasury.

LXXXVI.

O'er this frail flesh grim death may win control,
His lonely prisoner in the silent grave;
Yea, e'en may quench the ethereal fiery soul;
This victory at least he shall not have,—
That while this soul still lives, my love shall die.
To lose the happy fields, the sea, the skies,
The memory of that face, is misery,
But not the last and worst of miseries,
The death in life—of life that lives and knows
The degradation of forgetting all
It once held dearest. Oh, if this as close
Of all life's deepest yearnings should befall,
Take back, kind Heaven, the life Thy bounty gave
Swiftly, and let me die. I would not live death's slave.

LXXXVII.

Now durst my spirit stand face to face with death ;
His viewless eyes may glare into mine own
Blank horrors of unmeaningness ; his breath
May damp my brow, for stand I not alone.
Love's angel with sustaining arms I feel
Stronger than death himself encircle me ;
Thrilleth my ears his hymn like wild sweet peal
Of jubilant bells ; whether I live or die
He vanquisheth ; my agony was the fight
When he did wrestle with death and overthrow
The ghastly tyrant ; now ineffable light
Of pride and pity in his deep eyes doth glow,
While his voice through the spacious ether rings,
And sunset's purple glory burns on his snow-white
wings.

LXXXVIII.

Ah me !. the vision fades. Sudden a thought,
An awful thought, flashes into the brain,
That drives the spirit utterly distraught
With grief and fear, and rends the heart in twain ;
This is the secret of the painful earth,
The burthen that the darkness and the light
In long succession slowly bring to birth ;
The truth to witness which Love infinite
Hung on the cross :—not merely to the whole
Is infinite love a common atmosphere
Of goodness, but to each particular soul
As infinite as if none other were ;
And in that fondly hoped-for heaven above
The naked soul sees but the two eyes of that love.

LXXXIX.

Before the awful glow of that great light,
How shall the little feeble fading gleam
Of earthly love be not extinguished quite,
Perishing like the shadow of a dream
When day's full blaze is come? This is the sadness
That haunts alike thronged city and desert place;
All the desire, and pride, and power, and gladness,
The love wherewith man loveth, and the grace
That glads his heart, are types of the to-come.
They all shall vanish like a scroll that is furled,
When the soul of man goeth to its long home,
And dwelleth for aye in that eternal world
Where God is all in all, and Infinite Love
The single light of being to which all live and move.

XC.

And shall thy love be nothing then to me
And mine to thee? Oh, bitterness of death,
E'en in life's heart. It seemeth treachery
If love, that drew from thee his earliest breath
Of old on earth, whose tender mother thou wast,
Whose loftiest pride was never to forget,
Forgetful be of all the holy past,
And cast unto the void without regret
The days that on thy gracious bosom he lay,
A little opening flower, till when full grown
The eyes thou taughtest saw in thee each day
A grander height of womanhood. O crown
Of sorrow, wherefore bore he then the impress,
If but a dream, of the eternal faithfulness?

XCI.

Thinking of that pure face in which meek sorrow
Seemed so divine, and noble anger glowed
With such sweet sternness, which did greet the morrow
Of each bright day with brighter looks that flowed
From innocent joy and thankfulness,—to think
That love shall ever fade or fainter be
In that far world makes my whole spirit shrink,
And lying numbed with utter agony,
I can no longer think, nor speak, nor strive,—
Only the labouring heart, with painful beats
Driving life's wheels, tells me I am alive.
Ah, woe is me ! day wanes and night still fleets,
Time comes when my sad soul shall lose from sight
That love companion true of lonely day and night.

XCII.

Meseems it were a lighter fate to be
To fires eternal doomed, if but a trace
Of tears sometimes for that my misery
In heaven glittered on that angel face,
Than meeting in the amarantine courts
That thy dear soul for me no smile should bear.
O Majesty on high, pardon my thoughts,
If aught of impious their complexion wear;
I know that hell is but to be outcast
From presence of Thy love; yet Thy love even
Seems less to me not more, if at the last
Somehow, we know not how, its boundless heaven
Of love includes not all true loves of earth,
Perfect and pure from earthly stain in that new birth.

XCIII.

O Infinite Love, forgive me if in aught
My will be rebel to Thy holy name;
Thee since life's dawn with feeble feet I sought,
Through frequent fall and bitter inward shame
Of burning conscience bringing fresh desire
Of thy perfection. Sometimes 'mid the strife
And tumult of the world, like intense fire
The sense of the eternal glares on life;
My whole soul yearns towards Thee, and pants and cries
After Thy glory, and the heart swells with tears
Of awe and love and sorrow. Before thine eyes
All hearts are open, all man's hopes and fears
Are known; Thou knowest, since that sweet purity
Shone on my life, I live not less but more to Thee.

XCIV.

Yet doth my spirit wholly loathe her fate,
If in Thy glory e'en sweet earthly loves
Are wholly lost for ever. Thou art great,
O Lord; towards Thee the whole creation moves.
Thy love protects and cherishes the weak;
Thou art the father of the fatherless;
Of thee the desolate and oppressèd seek
For comforting, all wrongs await redress.
Surely that deep desire from thee proceeds,
In man's and woman's heart implanted deep,
For something not so strong but that it needs
Comfort and cherishing; eyes that may weep
Upon the happy bosom that thrills elate
With the deep pride and bliss of love compassionate.

XCV.

Ah, did the love *the* Man His Father bore
War with the love He bore His Church the Bride?
And to our hearts is He not Christ still more,
Pressing the loved disciple to His side
When shadows from the coming agony
Swept o'er His soul? Since we too feeble are
To comprehend the eternal harmony
Of universal and particular,
Were it not well to trust the simple love
That hopes and clings and will not be cast out,
And still the more faith's eyes are fixed above
Upon the Infinite Love still less can doubt
That in the end God's sanction shall be given,
And those that loved on earth may love for aye in heaven?

XCVI.

How tender-holy woman's love, who sees
The strong man seeking comfort at her feet,
Whose strength is her deep pride! By what degrees
Of poor comparison shall any mete
The sacred pride and joy of man who knows
That fair jewel of a woman's heart his own
Whose purity was his love! Can we suppose
Such love as this God made for time alone?
O goodness, such as seemed of the divine
Some bright reflex in such sweet fashion blent
With gentle weaknesses so feminine,
I cannot think but love of thee was sent
From heaven itself, and shall not cease to be
Even in the awful presence of eternity.

XCVII.

What time the soul, with loveliness awestricken,
Beholds the sunset flush the eternal snows
On some far peak, or deep emotions quicken
The beating of some lonely heart that glows
With joy and longing at some burning thought,
Conceived in silence, doth not the spirit yearn
For one sweet soul's complete communion wrought
By sympathy? Hence may be we should learn
That truest worship is not of one alone,
In solitude adoring silently,
But of two souls that have by loving grown
Even as one in holy constancy;
That being's deep calling to fellow deep,
The solemn harmony of praise shall never sleep.

XCVIII.

Oh mighty Love, thou hast triumphed and driven
Afar the last dark doubt that would divide
The house of Love against itself, and riven
With glorious voice, that through the darkness cried,
The veil from heaven's face,—a strange sad cry
That mingled agony and high command,
Like a king's voice that suffers and would die
To save his people. On life's unseen strand
I hear the billows of eternity
Tranquilly breaking. Though the land around
My path is dark and drear, afar the sky
Gleams with fair morning twilight, and the sound
Of the dim distant ocean saith, "Rest, rest,
My bosom thou fear'st shall be thy own belovèd's breast."

XCIX.

Yet think not, loved one, though despair be fled,
And my sad soul some measure hath attained
Of faith and hope, and some sweet moments shed
Rose petals round the thorny pathway stained
By footprints of Love's blood, that this my life
Is truly happy being apart from thee.
Keen memories, and the everlasting strife
Of will and sorrow, life-long agony,
And sharpest stings of unfulfilled desire
Deep in the tender quivering heart-flesh make
The lapse of crawling time like a slow fire;
Though may no pang the loving spirit shake,
This only for this world could Love obtain
That with his constancy I might endure my pain.

C.

Still oftentimes my weary spirit bleeds,
Toiling sorehearted through the stony hours
Of every-day existence for the needs.
Of life that is but pain, whose way no flowers
May spring to gladden. The blank house fronts that rise
In gloomy lines seem big with misery;
And at street corners echoes of old sighs
That human hearts uttered, but none was by
To hear them, flit unheeded. I would fain
Bring faint relief to my intense desire,
Expressing it in words. Ah, words are vain;
Their feeble force seems utterly to expire,
Unequal to the meaning they should bear,
While from the lips just born they tremble on the air.

CI.

I may not do as some have done in song,
Building bright dreams to assuage their misery;
My heart shrinks from the faintest shade of wrong
Done but in dreams thy maiden modesty.
My fancy may not feign thy fond embrace,
The deep ineffable rapture of thy kiss
So kind and innocent, the sweet shy grace
Of absolute surrender, perfect bliss
Of eyes that look their fill in answering eyes,
And are not shamed. If careless thought provides
Love's hunger these, the touch of woman that lies,
His mother's gift, in man's heart gently chides.
In thought, e'en as in life, my love of thee
Is blent with reverence. Thou hast not bidden me.

16825

CII.

I will not strive in my poor song to paint
The beauty of that form whose every grace,
Recalled by memory, makes my spirit faint
With longing. Every touch of that dear face,
Dear eyes, lips, brows, dear bosom and hand also,
Not for themselves chiefly, but for the soul
Of love that there indwells, I love, and know
That love would rather honour the perfect whole,
Than as some use—load each particular sweet
With praises, till its spiritual beauty
Has fled for ever, leaving but cloying meat
To sate the glutton senses. Love's high duty
Is strong and noble service as in God's sight,
Not the weak slave's who grovels unto his eyes' delight.

CIII.

Love's joy in physical beauty should but be
The visible pledge of the eternal union
Of souls, the which is love's reality;
To call that love which lacketh such communion
Is horrible mockery and prostitution
Of His most sacred name. The love effaced
By growing time,—that suffers diminution
When age's envious hand sad lines hath traced
In the belovèd's face,—such is not love:
'Tis but brief flight of fickle fancy's wing,
Like honey-bees from flower to flower that rove,
Now this way drawn, now that. The love I sing
Is of the soul, and like it shall stand fast,
When all things lapse beside in the forgotten past.

CIV.

This thought most vexes my tormented heart,
Haunting the footsteps of my lonely way,—
Do what I will my act cannot impart
One touch of joy or sorrow to her day
Whose slightest momentary whim to please,
Or win the guerdon of a passing look,
I could endure all pain, and think it ease.
Ah, woe is me! Only from some deep nook
Of my sad heart goeth perpetual prayer,
Amid the roar and bustle of the crowd,
Silently up to heaven for her welfare.
Though the blast roar without and storm be loud,
At that dim shrine, in plaintive litany,
The voice of pleading love continually doth cry.

CV.

Yet though inexorable fate deny
My dearest prayer, this much there still remains :
My soul may strive, day by day, till I die,
And hour by hour as life's long twilight wanes
To grow through love more worthy of loving thee.
Who loves what is so true, so pure, so kind
Can he untrue, impure, unkindly be ?
And if he stray shall not those eyes remind
His wandering spirit of the sacred past ?
Like some strong guardian angel that restrains
Men in their darkest moments, when the blast
Of furious wrath impels, or when the reins
Are given to the neck of fierce desire,
And the soul trembles like a tongue of ravenous fire.

CVI.

O gentle spirit, thou that anywhere
Pinest for love and art unsatisfied,
And thinkest, Wherefore should I breathe the air
Of heaven longer, seeing my life is void
Of use not less than love?—how knowest thou
That some wild heart hath not, beholding thee,
Been chastened by thy goodness, and e'en now,
The hour of thy most deep despondency,
Thou workest not redemption? Heaven's ways
Are deep beyond our ken, and oftentime
The soul that mourneth o'er the vacant days,
Seeming to waste in vain its golden prime,
Shall hear, first sound breaking on that new birth,
"Welcome most faithful minister of Love on earth."

CVII.

How many a noble nature have I seen
Day by day from its nobleness decline
To hard self-love, and known that it has been
Even for want of such a face as thine
To light the heart's gross darkness, and to shame
The devil that lies in wait for human lives
With visions of false beauty, wordly fame,
But most with love's bright counterfeit he strives
To quench the spark of pure ethereal fire
And choke the still small voice! For if true love
The chambers of life's house do not inspire,
Then to all evil-thirsting spirits that rove,
Seeking a body whereto to be wed
It lieth open wide,—yea, swept and garnishèd.

CVIII.

O man, my brother, if each flying hour
Were governed by the sacred sovereign thought
Of one heaven-plighted love and perfect flower
Of noblest womanhood, how then could aught
To us be tolerable that might throw
The faintest shade of shame or disrespect
On any woman, howsoever low
She might have fallen? Nay, rather to protect
And reverence the lowest and most forlorn
Were ours, as thereby doing reverence
And loving homage to her that hath been born
Our spirit's queen. Heard not the inner sense
The exquisite pathos of a voice that cried,
"Ah cruel, shaming her thou shalt shame me beside"?

CIX.

Woman, my sister, as a man's desire
So even is he himself. If thou art great
Thou shalt be like divinely glowing fire
Within his breast, and from his clay create
A life of noble and harmonious deeds.
If thou art little, narrow-minded, vain,
And, like fair garden full of idle weeds,
With paltry trifles fill a vacant brain,
Then there is never depth however deep
Of vice and baseness whither man shall not go;
His heart shall be a sepulchre where sleep
All high and bright emotions mouldering slow
In dark corruption, where no holy light
Casting warm rays may bless the soul's eternal night.

CX.

Bleak March returns with boisterous winds and keen,
Yet not without a touch of gentleness
In his pale skies and shoots of early green,
As though the dying Winter to confess
His penitence were loath, brazening it out
With rugged mien and gusts of sudden rage.
Wee new-born lambs, the chill gray fields about,
Plaintively bleat, as seeking to engage
Kind Heaven's mercy. O unseen Tenderness,
That of Thy love for smallest living thing
Comfortest earth with pitiful caress
After stern Winter's bitter chastening,
Be not far from me when the withering pain
Of utter loneliness oppresses heart and brain.

CXI.

Once more the sacred season draweth near
When first we met. The day that of all days
And anniversaries which the circling year
Presents, most piercing memories shall raise.
When the dear Lord, who through all life's events
Worketh redemption though our sense be dim,
Who maketh all things holy instruments
To draw the wandering spirit back to Him,
Did of His loving care irradiate
My lonely darkness with that light of love,
The which of old He did Himself create
To be the earthly type of that above
Which doth in everlasting heaven dwell
Almighty, uncreate, incomprehensible.

CXII.

Only by loving other human creatures
Can our poor eyes of flesh and blood discern
Some faint reflection of the unseen features
Of Infinite Love. But most of Him we learn
From the pure love of wedded souls that live
Each for the other, to whose close embrace
Wisdom and reverential wonder give
Perpetual sanctity. Nearest God's face
Its angel stands without a shade of fear
In his deep eyes, as his dark counterpart
Nearest the devil's throne in hell doth rear
His shameless head. Therefore though heart to heart
We be not one, yet bless I Heaven's decree
Which makes my spirit one with thy sweet memory.

CXIII.

Yet haply then of all the changing year,
When first love dawned, my heart shall beat most low
And painfully, aching for constant fear,
As close of all life's longings, I should know
She loves me not. To these my weary days
The sullen unrelenting hours refuse
Those bright endearments and soft winning ways
A gracious woman knoweth how to use
Unto the man she loves. To me no voice
When I depart bids sweet encouragement,
When I return no darling eyes rejoice
To see me come. Only love's force unspent
Gives life one hope to be its guiding star
That trembles, yet not fades, in the deep heaven afar.

CXIV.

But though hope fades not, she has varying keys
In which her song is pitched : some bold and glad,
As when swift-winged imagination sees
Desire accomplished ; some piteous sad,
As when the spirit, writhing 'neath the stings
Of close-coiled anguish, thinks, of all the years
That lie perchance 'twixt it and death, none brings
Her sight, whose memory fills the eyes with tears
Of longing insupportable. God knows
How hard sometimes is trust,—how faint the sense
That one minutely loving purpose goes
Through all the points of man's experience,—
How near faith's brightest moments black despair,
Circling on batlike pinions, flaps the shuddering air.

CXV.

For when I think upon what might have been,
Bewildering doubt and unconsoled regret
Still dim faith's eyes, and in my ear unseen
Cold lips still whisper, "All is vain: forget."
Ah, might have been. What depth of awful meaning
The words contain! what inarticulate
Deep misery of the young soul's bitter weaning
From its bright dreams to hard unlovely fate!
Alas! what were I now if fate had given
To my unworthy soul that thou hadst said,
"I love thee?" Ah, by how much nearer heaven,
By what great strides of good accomplishèd,
What nobler purpose, more intense desire
Of all things high and pure, thy spirit should inspire!

CXVI.

E'en now, e'en now the keen remembered pain
Of parting thrills each unforgetful nerve.
How long, O Lord, how long shall love remain
Merely a memory and hope trembling serve
Before the dear reward of his life-toil
Be won or lost for aye? To Thee alone
How long frail flesh may bear this mortal coil,
Before rest long denied shall come, is known.
Behold, I know not what I am, nor where
My spirit's unknown future shall be cast,—
If when death claims his own, some loving care
Shall lead my soul and all be well at last.
Only I know that, let come what come will,
While thought still holdeth empire, I shall love her still.

CXVII.

How could I cease to love, when subtle thought
Hath interwoven those sweet memories
With all things true and holy, and to aught
The soul holds highest my love as closely lies
As warp doth unto woof? O longings known
Only to God, O anguish slowly stilled
To life-long sorrow, often have ye shown
To many a heart its noblest self, and filled
Its aching void with the consciousness
Of the Eternal Charity denied
To careless hearts that can forget and bless
The crowding joys that thrust the old love aside.
To him that with unspoken pains must dwell
The thought, none knows, none cares, is all too terrible.

CXVIII.

O soul that criest in thine agony,
"Surely I am forsaken: there is none
In the wide universe that cares for me,
And with my wretchedness I am all alone,"
Comfort thyself. Whence came thy bitter yearning,
If there be not a Love that cares for men,
For each particular soul, in each discerning
The image lost to feeble human ken
Of each as Love conceived it? 'Twere the same
As if man's frame were made to feel the fangs
Of poignant hunger and thirst's withering flame
Without the power to appease their pangs,
If that which to his heart of hearts doth seem
Deepest of all desires is but a baseless dream.

CXIX.

O Thou whose voice, whose glorious voice, doth make
The mountains tremble at Thy majesty,
Whose thoughts the mighty pulses are that shake
Through all the worlds, and yet there may not die
A single house-top sparrow without Thee,—
As mother husheth fretful babe that cries
It scarcely knows for what, so comfort me
With steadfast faith that 'mid the eternities
The soul of man is not of little worth,
Nor true love like the flower of the field,
To which one heedless wind of heaven gives birth,
The next one slays it. Let me never yield
One moment to the thousand tongues that cry
"Take thou thy pleasure now; to-morrow thou shalt die."

CXX.

Ah yet again as once in that old hall,
On wild gray mornings when the wind is loud,
And weary music in its rise and fall
Awakes the past, I see those cedars bowed,
And, 'mid the fierce gusts' distant gathering roar,
That light footfall upon the creaking stair
Makes my heart leap; one little moment more
That face upon me like a morning fair
Shall beam again, that voice shall thrill my ear.
Alas! sweet day-dream, to awake from thee,
Feigning almost joy cónsummate, to drear
Cold daylight of life's hard reality,
Inflicts, meseems, a pang well nigh as great
As in that hour when first love knew his bitter fate.

CXXI.

And so with pain but little dulled by time
I end these few poor lines,—just dulled enough
To make life possible. Though youth's bright prime
Endeth for me in clouds, of such poor stuff
I am not made that I should wish that pain
Were one whit less, if love were therewith less.
As love still lasts while life's long hours wane,
Teach me, O Lord, to trust Thy faithfulness
More utterly than before. What time my loss
Was fresh I scarce could trust. Like desert sand
The future seemed to travellers that cross
With faltering steps o'er some heat-smitten land,
One hopeless, parched, illimitable length,
And my faith almost fainted. Now I know love's strength.

00046825

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018